



November 19, 2012

Maiyoua Vang:

Thank you for contacting me concerning Dr Covington's commitment to including parents and parent input as a key component to successful schools. Unfortunately, as chair of the District Advisory Committee's (DAC) Parent Advocacy Task Force (PATF), I cannot confirm this commitment.

During his tenure as superintendent of the Kansas City Public Schools (KCPS), Dr Covington fostered a contentious and often times adversarial relationship with parent advocates. This is evident in Dr Covington's handling of the Delano school closing, and Carver contract proposal. I am using these examples because I helped to organize parents around these issues and have maintained audio recordings of meetings with Dr Covington, and written documentation concerning the events that occurred including: letters from parents to Dr Covington, signed petitions, email communications with Dr Covington and his staff, and presentations and statements made by parents during the public comments portion of the KCPS Board of Directors open meetings. I am happy to provide you with this documentation upon request.

Concerning the closing of Delano school, a school for special needs students, Dr Covington hosted 2 open forums in accordance with board policy where he informed parents of the schools closing and invited them to ask questions concerning the transfer of students. Initially parents with disabled children were outraged because the staff at the Delano school was considered to be a safe haven for students with moderate to severe physical and mental disabilities. As such the parents demanded that the school remain open indefinitely, a request that was unreasonable considering state law that required students to be placed in the least restrictive environment.

As a parent advocate, I provided parents with information concerning the state requirements and worked to clearly define the parent's concern. Ultimately the parents, though uncomfortable with inclusive classrooms, determined that they were most concerned about the quality of care and instruction their children would receive when the Delano school closed. As such the parents requested information concerning trainings offered to teachers instructing in inclusive classrooms and facility accessibility. Dr Covington and his senior staff repeatedly refused to provide the information requested, so the parents began submitting Sunshine requests for the public records that senior administrators refused to provide. After receiving and reviewing the information, parents became more concerned with the quality of instruction that would be provided and requested that the Board of directors audit the Special Education Department. The request was granted. The audit showed that with the exception of facilities the department was not prepared to provide quality care and instruction for special needs students.

Additionally parents requested that Dr Covington postpone the closing of Delano for one year and use that time to prepare and train teachers to use the co-teaching model in inclusive classrooms. The request was made based on the recommendation of MPACT, a statewide training and information center that serves parents of disabled children, and the University of Missouri-Kansas City's Resource for Professional Development Centers, both of which stated that to be effective teachers needed a minimum of six months training to be effective in using the model. Initially, Dr Covington and his staff intended to provide just 2 hours of disability sensitivity training to teachers in co-teaching classrooms as a result of parent advocacy and a mandate from the Board of Directors to provide more training. Teacher's received 8 hours of training that covered disability sensitivity and individualized education plans.

Throughout this process Dr Covington refused to work with parent leaders unless instructed to do so by the Board of Directors, he refused to provide parents with requested public records unless

District Advisory Committee 2011-2012

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Sunshine requests were submitted to the legal department, and refused to consider reasonable requests made concerning instruction. Ultimately, because of his disregard for parent input and concerns, the number of days spent in out of school suspension increased dramatically for exceptional education students during the 2011-12 school year and more than 30% of KCPS exceptional education students transferred out of the district during that same year.

Concerning the proposal to make George Washington Carver Dual Language, a Spanish-English full immersion/dual language signature school, a contract school, Dr Covington refused to provide assurances that he and his staff would support the dual language programming at Carver by informing parents of proposed changes to the programming and impact that proposed changes would have and seeking parent input concerning the proposed changes before changes are made. This request was made because as the chair of the School Advisory Committee for Carver, I had to speak with Dr Covington concerning program changes mandated by senior level leadership that conflicted with the research upon which the model was based. On three separate occasions, senior level administrators came to the school and demanded that English instruction time be increased and Spanish decreased while refusing to look at the research and evidence that supported the existing levels of Spanish-English instruction. Throughout the process I met with Dr Covington on a weekly basis. Each time asking Dr Covington how we could work together to support the dual language programming and eliminate the need for parents to submit a request to become a contract school to the Board of Directors. At the beginning of the process Dr Covington and his Chief of Staff would meet with me. Toward the end of the process Dr Covington his chief of staff and at least 5 of his senior administrators, none of whom spoke during the meeting, would meet with me. I believed this to be a failed attempt at intimidation. He finally refused to continue meeting with me and said: "do what you need to do because I and I will not be forced to answer to parents." He also described the interactions as "going to war." Because of this parents and teachers had no choice, but to move forward with submitting a contract school proposal to Dr Covington and the Board of Directors.

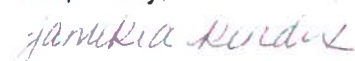
According to Board policy, the Carver contract proposal could not be considered by the board without Dr Covington's recommendation. Dr Covington refused to consider the proposal and fired the principal had acted as an advocate for the program since its inception. He issued a rejection letter before the proposal was submitted and refused to reconsider it despite more than 250 letters submitted by parents in support of the proposal and more than 500 petition signatures representing more than 80% of the families at Carver Dual language. Today, more than 50 of the families and staff that had supported the dual language programming at Carver, moving with the program on three separate occasions, have transferred and a number of students are receiving supplemental education services and tutoring to recover the year of instruction lost during the 2011-12 school year when the program came under new leadership.

Two examples of the contentious and adversarial relationship Dr Covington fostered with parents are described above, but there are several others. These examples explain why I do not believe that Dr Covington values parents and parent input as a part of successful schools, except when parents are uninformed and willing to ignore problems with reform implementation at the school level.

This disregard for parents benefited KCPS during the right-sizing process because it enabled Dr Covington to close more than 30 schools causing the district to become fiscally solvent. However, this approach also allowed many of the reforms that looked great on paper to be implemented poorly thereby having a very negative impact on student achievement and causing the district to lose accreditation in January 2012.

If you have any questions or need more information, feel free to contact me at Jamekia.Kendrix@gmail.com or 816-509-9240.

Respectfully,



Jamekia Kendrix, Chair
DAC Parent Advocacy Task Force